

Appraisal of Colleges of Education Social Studies Curriculum Vis-à-vis the Junior High School (JHS) Social Studies Curriculum Implementation in Ghana

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Abstract

Social Studies as a subject in the Junior High School (JHS) curriculum in Ghana is taught mostly by diploma teachers from the country's thirty-eight Colleges of Education. Analysis of the Colleges Social Studies curriculum vis-à-vis the JHS syllabus reveal differences in how the subject is structured to prepare teachers to teach it at the JHS level.

An interpretative design was used for the study. The study revealed that: Colleges of Education use a particular conception of Social Studies curriculum for the production of basic school teachers; and, whilst the JHS Social Studies syllabus is problem oriented, the training college curriculum is an amalgamation of the social sciences, packed with more geography topics. It was recommended that Social Studies curriculum of the Colleges of Education should be harmonized to focus more on attitudes and values cultivation as well as skills development of students to be in consonance with the 2007 JHS Social Studies syllabus.

Key-words: Curriculum conception, Curriculum implementation, Syllabus, Transdisciplinary approach, Multidisciplinary approach.

1. Introduction

Social Studies is one of the subjects that can help change attitudes of citizens and thereby contribute to the socio-economic development of a nation, but educators of the subject have long argued over what exactly is meant by Social Studies. It was introduced in the United States of America based upon recommendations in the 1916 report of the Social Studies Committee of the Commission on the Reorganisation of Secondary Education (Kissock, 1981; Jarolimek, 1967). According to Jarolimek (1967), the introduction of social studies, as one of the curricula in American schools was a response to certain social pressures mounting at the time, on the need to inculcate certain values and sense of nationalism into the youth of America.

Over the past several years, Social Studies has become a more visible school subject and conception of learning Social Studies has evolved from doing and knowing to experiencing and making meaning. The tacit and piecemeal curriculum that has long characterized the Social Studies classroom seems to be gradually giving way to a more coherent and integrated set of objectives, benchmarks, and performance indicators. This approach is goal oriented with an emphasis on learner outcomes: the knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and disposition to action that teachers wish to develop in students (Farris, 2001: 59-60).

The above citation precisely describes the evolution of social studies as a single discipline of study among the school curriculum in Ghana. It has evolved from a collection of specific History and Geography topics, which used to characterize the early Social Studies curriculum into an issue centred (trans-disciplinary) subject.

In much of Africa, the introduction of Social Studies as part of the school's curriculum was preceded by the formation of the African Social Studies Programme (ASSP) in 1968 (Kissock, 1981). The introduction of Social Studies in Ghana thereafter was preceded by a follow up of Educational Conference of Mombasa in Winneba, Ghana, in 1969 during which it was adopted as part of the school curriculum. It was first introduced in the Primary Schools in 1972, where it was called Social/Environmental Studies. Also in 1976, all Teacher-Training Colleges in Ghana were asked to start the preparation of Basic School teachers. The above continued to be the situation until the new Educational Reforms of 1987.

Social Studies was introduced and confined to the Junior Secondary Schools (JSS), now Junior High School (JHS) and the teacher-training institutions. The subject in the primary schools became known as Environmental Studies, now citizenship education which is taught at the upper primary. In 1998 Social Studies was introduced in the Senior Secondary Schools (SSS), now Senior High School (SHS) to replace Life Skills. This recommendation was done by the 1994 Educational Review Committee, which provided the basis for continuation of learning in the discipline from the JSS to the SSS level.

This committee, however, succeeded in transforming social studies from amalgam (Kissock, 1981; Quartey, 1984; Barnes, 1982) of discrete traditional social science disciplines, which it used to be, to one that is issues

centred (Farris, 2001; Noddings, 2000; Kissock, 1981) and problem solving in nature (Martorrela, 1994; Banks, 1990; CRDD, 1998). This is because the panel that designed the new SSS syllabus was different, both in composition and orientation, from the panel that designed the JSS Social Studies curriculum in 1987.

Social Studies is now a compulsory course for teacher-trainees offering general programme of study in Colleges of Education in Ghana. The problem under review is that the aim of Social Studies in Ghana according to the teaching syllabus for Social Studies (CRDD, 2007) is that the subject is the study of society and its problems. This shows that the aim of Social Studies is Citizenship Education.

However, documentary evidence on the Social Studies curriculum of the Colleges of Education in Ghana seems doubtful and tends to show conceptual differences in how it is structured vis-à-vis the JHS Social Studies teaching syllabus. Therefore the purpose was to conduct a study to determine curriculum conception of Social Studies at these two levels. The research therefore sought to answer this question-what are the significant differences in the conceptions of Social Studies in Colleges of Education with relation to the JHS syllabus in Ghana?

2. Review of Literature on Teachers' Curriculum Conception and Curriculum Implementation

The conceptions teachers have about curriculum are part of teachers' implicit beliefs about education (Thompson, 1992). As Begg (2005:6) puts it, curriculum is "all planning for the classroom." This implies that curriculum is to provide a design which enables learning to take place. There are several ways that curriculum can be understood: one approach interprets curriculum primarily in terms of political power (e.g., curriculum as a fact, as practice, or as social conflict in Goodson, 1995), while a second analyses is the nature of what is taught (e.g., curriculum as race, gender, aesthetic, institutionalised, or poststructuralist texts in Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). This implies curricula usually define the learning that is expected to take place during a course or programme of study in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Since teachers use the curriculum in their teaching practice, it makes sense to appraise the Social Studies curriculum of Colleges of Education vis-à-vis the JHS Social Studies syllabus.

According to Urevbu (1985:3), formal curriculum refers to: what is laid down as the syllabus or that which is to be learnt by students. It is the officially selected body of knowledge which government, through the Ministry of Education or anybody offering education, wants students to learn. Defining what should be in the curriculum plans for the classroom requires answering the questions (1) who should determine what is taught and (2) what material should be taught. It would appear that there are a limited number of options available to curriculum developers in answering these questions. Who determines the curriculum can only be one or more of the following: (a) students' needs or wants, (b) teachers' knowledge and expertise, or (c) government's policies in response to society's problems or issues. The options for determining the substance of curriculum relates to either (a) important content, such as the chemical make-up of water or (b) important processes, such as knowing how to learn. Many studies have explored how teachers conceive of various subjects, including, Social Studies, Mathematics, English language, History (Calderhead, 1996; Clark & Peterson, 1986; Thompson, 1992). Studies have shown that teachers develop a subject understanding that is "broad and deep, enabling them to facilitate the building of similar connections in the minds of others" (Calderhead, 1996:716). It is also shown that the way teachers understand their subject affects the way they teach and assess. A reason for looking at Social Studies curriculum is that Clandinin & Connelly, (1992) assert that most teachers are not just delivery mechanisms or conduits for curriculum; rather they are creators or makers and implementers of curriculum.

Other researchers (Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Cheung & Wong, 2002) use the term orientation, which we consider to be equivalent in meaning (Brown, 2008). Five major orientations to curriculum have been described: (1) curriculum is about the development of processes or skills, especially in the cognitive domain rather than just in life or social domains, (2) curriculum is about exploiting approaches to maximize outputs, (3) curriculum is about reforming or revolutionizing society in order to bring about greater justice and benefits for all, (4) curriculum is about maximizing the humanity of individuals by helping them develop their full potential, and (5) curriculum is about identifying and passing on valued academic knowledge and intellectual developments (Eisner & Vallance, 1974; Cheung, 2000). Cheung (2000) has argued that these orientations to curriculum (a) explain why teachers emphasize certain topics, (b) clarify the real meaning or intent of curriculum documents, and (c) influence both teacher professional and curriculum development. Inspection of curriculum practice is not guaranteed to expose teachers' true orientation to curriculum as various contextual constraints may impose common curriculum practices on teachers with highly divergent views of curriculum (Cheung & Ng, 2000). Although teachers have interconnected conceptions of curriculum drawing on several orientations simultaneously, there appear to be patterns in teacher conception of curriculum (Cheung, 2000).

Teachers' conception represents part of teachers' mental contents or schemas that influence approaches and practice of teaching (Ernest, 1989). Research studies (Huang, Lin, Huang, Ma, & Han, 2002; Thompson, 1992) conclude that teachers' conception of a subject or a curriculum would shape their perceived curriculum and

therefore their implemented curriculum.

Indeed, the importance of teacher in the successful implementation of curriculum reform has been revealed in studies both in the West (i.e. Fullan, 2001; Nias, Southworth, & Campbell, 1992) and the East (Ou, 2000; Adamson, Kwan, & Chan, 2000; Lam, 1996; & Lee, 2002). Under the school-based curriculum development policy, the importance of teachers to the implementation of integrated programmes like Social Studies in schools is even more obvious.

In general, studies of teachers' understanding of the subjects they teach have shown those conceptions affect the way teachers teach and assess (Ertmer, 2005; Kane, Sandretto, & Heath, 2002; Prosser, Martin, Trigwell, Ramsden, & Lueckenhausen, 2005). These implicit orientations to curriculum shape the topics teachers emphasise and the meaning teachers give to curriculum documents. For example, in Social Studies, different major conceptions of the subject (i.e., multidisciplinary, traditional or discrete subjects understanding versus problem-solving oriented and trans-disciplinary understanding) are claimed to be major disagreement.

Chiodo and Byford (2004) study revealed that teachers' attitudes towards Social Studies education have unique influence on the Social Studies curriculum. Similarly, the findings from other studies indicate that the decisions of what to teach our children under Social Studies education often shift and are dependent on the influence of the conception of the teacher about the subject (Evans, 2004; Eshun, 2010).

The need for curriculum appraisal was raised by Quartey (2003) in his appraisal of the 1987 social studies syllabus for the JHS programme in Ghana. The importance of appraising the Colleges of Education curriculum vis-à-vis the JHS curriculum implementation can be seen from Goodlad's (1979) five levels of curriculum, namely ideal, formal, perceived, implemented, and experiential curricula. As Goodlad (1979) postulates, the implemented curriculum often differs to various extents from the ideal or formal curriculum. The perceived and implemented curricula vary from the conception of persons (policy-makers or curriculum developers) who plan or devise a curriculum innovation. This implies that curriculum conception of Social Studies is of high importance in the implementation process as this may shape teaching practice positively or negatively. This calls for social studies curriculum analysis.

3. Methodology

Qualitatively, interpretative design was adopted to determine the relationship between the Social Studies curriculum of the Colleges of Education vis-à-vis the JHS Social Studies teaching syllabus.

This was based on the two comparative documentary analysis process created by the researcher: (1) The course description and objectives for offering the Social Studies programme at Colleges of Education vis-à-vis the rational and objectives of the JHS syllabus; and (2) Content and nature of Colleges of Education Social Studies vis-à-vis the content of the JHS Social Studies syllabus. It was a purely documentary analysis of curricula documents.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 Course Description and Objectives of Colleges of Education Social Studies Vis-à-Vis the Rational and Objectives of the JHS Syllabus

Social Studies at Colleges of Education is run by Institute of Education-University of Cape Coast, whilst JHS Social Studies curriculum is prepared by Curriculum Research Development Division (CRDD). Social Studies is studied for four semesters at the Colleges of Education. The Colleges of Education has the following as its course description and objectives for Social Studies from year 1 and 2:

The Year 1, Semester 1 has its course description to examine the concept Environmental and Social Studies, the environment and its components buttressed with basic mapping skills. It also examines the various economic roles individuals play to prop up society and the roles of the financial institutions in supporting the various activities. The objectives are to: Create an awareness of the components of the environment; Equip students with basic mapping skills; Help students to develop the ability to make rational decisions; Provide opportunities for students to participate in projects and activities; and Encourage students with the knowledge and skills required to handle the subject effectively at basic school level.

The Year 1, Semester 2 course has its course description to examine the purpose and content of this course which is closely related to citizenship education which is cherished in many societies. It emphasises holistic approach to relevant issues such as gender, attitudes, values, beliefs, the skills of problem solving, and the role of community institutions in the development of society. The course also provides opportunity for students to acquire further knowledge in mapping skills. The course aims at: Creating an awareness of the important roles community institutions play in the development of society; Inculcating in students desirable social attitudes and values for good citizenship; Creating an awareness of the signals that the environment gives about its degradation; Making students aware of the way in which the environment can be protected from being degraded; and Enabling students to acquire further mapping skills.

The Year 2, Semester 1 deals with of Methods of Teaching Environmental and Social Studies. It has its course description to examine the concept integration, spiral and expanding environment approaches to curriculum

design in Environmental and Social Studies. It brings to the fore the meaning of methods, techniques and strategies used in teaching the subject. It also looks at the various teaching methods such as brainstorming, role-playing, simulation, discussion and debate. It also emphasizes the need for other resources such as resource room, resource person and community resource that go to enhance teaching and learning. It finally affords the student the opportunity to plan lessons on given topics in the subject. The objective are: Making students aware of the various teaching techniques that are applied in the teaching-learning process of the subject; Making students aware of the rationale for the choice or selection of a particular teaching and learning method or technique; and Provides students the skills that will enable them use the methods and techniques.

The Year 2, Semester 2 course has its course description to provide opportunities for students to discuss how society protects the individual to ensure peace and stability for sustainable national development; Issues on constitutional rule and provision of human rights; health services; food security and Ghana's relations with international organisations and agencies are examined. Map reading and interpretation which is an important academic or study skill is also highlighted in the course. The objectives of the course is designed to: Prepare students to participate successfully in the civic life of their community; Inculcate in students desirable attitudes and values for good citizenship; Encourage students to lead healthy lives; Acquaint students with skills to influence policy; Provide opportunities for students to appreciate the importance of Ghana's relations with international organisations and agencies; and Encourage students to make reflective decisions through map reading and interpretation.

The JHS syllabus was examined based on the rational for teaching and general aims of social studies. The designers of Social Studies Syllabus JHS programme (2007) see the rational for teaching Social Studies as the study of society and its problems thereby prepares the individual by equipping him or her with knowledge about the culture and ways of life of their society, its problems, its values and its hopes for the future. Here majority of the course description and objectives go with the JHS syllabus while few do not (i.e. acquisition of mapping skills; Map reading and interpretation etc.).

As a subject, Social Studies should help pupils/students to understand their society better; helps them to investigate how their society functions and hence assists them to develop that critical and at the same time developmental kind of mind that will transforms societies (CRDD, 2007). Here some course description and objectives of College of Education Social Studies go with it. Some examples are to inculcate in students desirable attitudes and values for good citizenship; and acquaint students with skills to influence policy.

General aims of 2007 Social Studies Syllabus for the JHS programme is to help the pupil to: understand the interrelationships between the social and the physical environment and their impact on the development of Ghana; appreciate the impact of history on current and future development efforts of the country; appreciate the various components of the environment and how these could be maintained to ensure sustainable development; recognize the major challenges facing Ghana and be able to develop basic knowledge and skills for dealing with such challenges; understand the dynamics of development in the world and their impact on development in Ghana; develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes needed for personal growth, peaceful co-existence, and respect for peoples of other nations; and develop a sense of national consciousness and national identity. Here majority of the objectives are in line with the general aims of JHS Social Studies syllabus. Example is to provide the opportunities for students to appreciate the importance of Ghana's relations with international organisations and agencies. However, acquisition of mapping skills which falls within the domain of geography cut across three semesters out of the four. Geography is over concentrated in the college curriculum, whilst the JHS syllabus is issue-centred. The fourth semester centred on acquisition of pedagogical skills by students which is supposed to imbue in them teaching skills at the basic level.

4.2 Content of Colleges of Education Social Studies Vis-à-vis the JHS Social Studies Syllabus

There was the need to ascertain whether the nature and content of Social Studies curriculum of Colleges of Education fall in line with or differ from the Junior High School Social Studies syllabus. This has become a matter of interest as teachers trained from teacher training institutions will find themselves teaching in the first cycle institutions (Primary and JHS) in Ghana. It is of paramount importance as this may influence one's art of teaching as concept formation in teaching and learning will become very difficult to erase. The Colleges of Education has the following as the content and nature of Social Studies from year 1 to 2:

The topics for Year I semester 1 course are: The subject Environmental and Social Studies; Component of the environment; Maps and scales; Resources and their utilization for sustainable development in Ghana; Various types of occupations/productions; and Financial institutions. The topics for year I semester 2 course are: The role of community institutions in the development of society; Human resource and development; Environmental degradation; Methods of showing relief on maps; Representation of direction, and position and conventional signs used on Ghana maps.

The topics for year 2 semester 1 course are: Integration/Integrated approach to the designing of Environmental and Social Studies curriculum; The Spiral approach to the designing of environmental and Social Studies

programme; The Concentric/Expanding horizon approach to the designing of environmental and Social Studies programme; Brainstorming technique; Role-play; Simulation; Debate; Discussion; Teaching and learning resources; Community resources; Resource person/guest speaker; Resource room; and Lesson planning and presentation. The topics for year 2, semester 2 are: Constitutional rule and provision of human right; Health issues: Reproductive health and significance of reproductive health education; Food security; Ghana's relationship with international organisations and agencies; Map interpretation; and statistical mapping.

The scope of content of the current JHS Social Studies syllabus (2007) reflects the tools needed by individual to solve personal and societal problems. This means that the subject is supposed to be problem solving oriented, theme based and trans-disciplinary in nature. These do not fall in line with the College of Education Social Studies course structure. The courses examine under the Colleges of Education programme are mainly facts, concepts and topics bootlegged from the discrete subjects in the social sciences with geography taking precedence. Examples are Maps and scales; methods of showing relief on maps; representation of direction, position and conventional signs used on Ghana maps; methods of showing relief and drainage on maps; slopes; intervisibility and gradient; map interpretation; and statistical diagrams/mapping (pie chart, bar graphs, line graphs) etc.

The scope of content of (2007) Social Studies Syllabus for Junior High School is concerned with equipping the pupil with an integrated knowledge, skills and attitudes that will help the pupil develop a broader perspective of Ghana and the world. Here, the Colleges of Education Curriculum although equipped students with integrated knowledge it is done in the discrete subjects in the social sciences and it is not problem solving oriented. As a result of this it is not in line with the Scope of content of the 2007 Social Studies Syllabus for JHS level.

According to CRDD, (2007) The integration in Social Studies is to be achieved in the three sections of the syllabus each of which focuses respectively on: Governance, Politics and Stability; the Environment; and Social and Economic Development. This shows that courses in Social Studies of Colleges of Education should be centred on issues around the Environment; Government, Politics and Stability; and Social and Economic Development that will help the pupil develop a broader perspective of Ghana and the world. From the syllabus, it then shows that the integration of Social Studies should be trans-disciplinary in nature and must not be shown in separate subjects in the social sciences but should be theme-based and problem-solving oriented. With this, the College of Education Social Studies curriculum saw it right, but the facts, concepts and generalization are bootlegged from the social sciences. Here it is deduced that both level see it as integration but there is a problem of acceptable level of integration.

Colleges of Education see the integration as individual subject areas as greater number of topics are geography packed, followed by economics and history. The level of integration is the source of confusion because every subject borrows from other subjects just like Social Studies. But the facts and ideas borrowed by Social Studies are so utilized that they assist in producing reflective, competent and concerned citizen who can live effectively in the society (Martorella, 1994). The Colleges of Education Social Studies programme does not just borrow facts but bootlegs whole topics from History, Geography, Economics, and Sociology. This created the source of confusion. A teacher who has an in-depth knowledge in Social Studies will not present facts from the social sciences but the distillate part which must rather be used to solve threatening individual problems and that of society. This distillate part will develop the positive attitudes, values and skills needed to make critical and informed decisions in life as responsible citizens.

The subject is multi-disciplinary and takes its source from Geography, History, Sociology, Psychology, Economics, Civic Education and Science (CRDD, 2007). The essential knowledge and principles from these disciplines are integrated into a subject that stands on its own and the topics from this syllabus reflect the problems of the individual and society (CRDD, 2007). Examples are managing and preventing conflicts, problems of development in Ghana and mapping our environment. This means that the essential elements of the knowledge and principles from the various disciplines in the social sciences should have been integrated into a subject that stands on its own in a single subject that will make it to be seen as problem oriented, theme based and trans-disciplinary in nature and not as the discrete subjects in the social sciences. Here the Colleges of Education Social Studies curriculum saw it right but the acceptable level of integration of the social sciences is the problem as the various parts are clearly seen as facts, concepts and generalization bootlegged from the social sciences. Some of the topics has no bearing in teaching and learning at the JHS level.

From the documents on Social Studies curriculum at Colleges of Education and JHS one can deduce that Social Studies at Colleges of Education is meant to produce trained and qualified teachers who have subject matter knowledge in some subject areas such as Geography as many topics are bootlegged from it (i.e. map work, slopes, statistical mappings etc) which are not taught at the JHS level. The JHS syllabus rather shows that the programme is to equip students with relevant knowledge which form the basis for enquiry into issues and how to solve one's problem and that of society; inculcate in students the attributes of good citizenship.

The above suggests that Colleges of Education curriculum goes with the 1987 social studies syllabus which has more geography topics, whilst the JHS syllabus is rather packed as a single subject which is problem and theme based and trans-disciplinary in nature.

4.3 Implications for Teaching

Teacher Training Colleges having different modes of delivering Social Studies contrast to the current JHS syllabus may tend to influence trained teachers as to what the meaning of Social Studies is, its contents and why it is worth teaching at the basic level. With this, much is needed to assist Social Studies teachers to be abreast with the nature and the content of Social Studies in a harmonized subject matter required to improve the quality of teaching and learning as this may influence the way they will select content, set objectives, teach and assess their pupils.

5. Conclusions

Colleges of Education use a particular conception of Social Studies curriculum for the production of Social Studies education teachers for basic schools different from the JHS Social Studies syllabus.

Colleges of Education subscribes to and uses traditional subject-centred or discrete subject perspective whereby facts, concepts and generalizations are bootlegged from the social sciences (i.e. geography, economics, history, sociology, etc) with a multidisciplinary approach, whilst the JHS syllabus is holistic, theme based, problem solving with a trans-disciplinary approach.

Both college of education and the JHS syllabus view social studies as integration but there is a problem of acceptable level of integration.

The Colleges of Education Social Studies course content is more of Geography topics which most of them has no bearing to the basic teaching and learning of Social Studies. Most of the topics are not found in the ideal curriculum in use at the JHS level. The curriculum is rather in consonance of the 1987 JHS Social Studies syllabus.

Teaching Social Studies is stressed to be done in student-centred techniques and strategies. Brainstorming, role-playing, simulation, discussion and debate were the major techniques stressed by both colleges of education curriculum and the JHS social studies syllabus.

6. Recommendations

The issue is bridging theory and practice by for-going ideologies in education. This can be done by bringing the ideal curriculum into practice. This I mean the Institute of Education-University of Cape Coast which oversee curriculum development in colleges should institutes measures that will lead to putting the Basic School Social Studies syllabus into use in the Colleges of Education and not the differences in curriculum conception at both levels. This will result in continuation of what student-teachers already know whiles in college and what they will be teaching in the upper primary which is Citizenship Education and Social Studies at the JHS level.

Social Studies curriculum of the Colleges of Education should be harmonized to focus more on attitudes and values cultivation as well as skills development of students to be in consonance with the 2007 JHS Social Studies syllabus. This will forge a better ground for the training of teachers in the field of Social Studies.

At least two credit hours course should be designed and mounted on the current Junior High Schools Social Studies syllabus for students as part of their programme of study. This will help teachers to become familiar with the content of the syllabus, making it easy in their selection of valid content, setting of appropriate objectives in their teaching and even the mode of using appropriate assessment tools. If importance is attached to Social Studies then resources already invested in its planning and implementation in Ghana, must be followed by programme review and remedial measures taken early, so as to make it more effective and viable.

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